



Sen. Joyce Mulliken's UPDATE FROM OLYMPIA 3/5/04

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Committee Assignments

Land Use & Planning (Chair)
Highways & Transportation
Commerce & Trade
Natural Resources, Energy
& Water (Ex officio member)

This week, the Senate amended **ESHB 2460** to make health care more accessible and affordable for employees of small businesses.

Because of state mandates, the majority of small businesses cannot afford to offer their employees health care coverage. The bill – as passed by the Senate – will allow insurance carriers to offer “scaled-down” plans while still offering optional coverage for every category of provider.

Join my 13th District House colleagues and me this Tuesday morning at 9:00 am on KBSN, 1470 AM in Moses Lake. I encourage you to tune in and learn more about what's happening in Olympia. You can even call the show and ask questions on the air!

Dear Friends,

By the time you read this, there will be just less than a week left to the 2004 Legislative Session. As we approach the final days, our most important responsibility of the session remains undecided.

As many of you know, our state's political parties sued the state, saying our blanket primary – where anybody can vote for anybody, regardless of party affiliation – goes against the constitutional rights of their association. As a result, the Legislature is tasked with providing a new primary system. Here is a brief summary of the most viable options we looked at::

Modified Blanket Primary

Voters don't register by party. Top two vote getters advance to the general election regardless of party affiliation. Parties don't receive lists of who voted for their candidates. Voters are not restricted to a single party ballot. Voter privacy is protected.

Louisiana or “Cajun” Primary

The top two vote getters advance, but voters are required to register by party and the parties receive a list of members. While many media reports have not distinguished between the Cajun and modified blanket styles, there are key differences. The biggest one is required party affiliation. Further, in Louisiana, if a candidate gets 51 percent approval, he or she is elected right then and there in the primary. That is not the case with the modified blanket primary.

Montana Primary

Voters don't register with a party, but must select one party's ballot to vote so it's not possible to vote for a Republican in one race and a Democrat in another. Parties are not notified who picked their ballots.

Modified Montana

People who choose to register by party will receive only that party's ballot. Those who choose to remain unaffiliated would receive a ballot from each of the state's major parties (Republican, Democrat and Libertarian), but can only vote for – and return – one ballot. If a voter returns more than one ballot, his or her votes are not counted. The county auditors are very concerned about implementing this, and the fiscal impact to taxpayers. Candidates must sign declaration of party affiliation and follow party rules as adopted.

This week, I chose to vote for the system that most closely resembles the one we've had in place for 70 years: the modified blanket primary. However, this issue is still undecided. Negotiations are ongoing. Please call or e-mail me with your thoughts and/or preferences. I believe I know what many of you would have me do, but I need to know with more certainty.

In my opinion, this is one of the most important issues we have faced in the 10 years I have served you in Olympia. Keeping voters, and future candidates, involved in our public process is important for the protection of our rights.

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Sen. Joyce Mulliken, 13th Legislative District